

March 9, 2015

To: Finance, Revenue, and Bonding Committee  
Senator John W. Fonfara  
Representative Jeffrey J. Berger

From: Vernon Open Space Task Force

Re: SB 946 – Section 29; Community Investment Account

Testimony Opposing the Funding "Sweep" from the  
Community Investment Account

The Vernon Open Space Task Force (OSTF) strongly opposes the complete sweep of funding from the Community Investment Act.

The Vernon OSTF has been working to preserve open space in Vernon since passage of the State's landmark land preservation act, the Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition (OSWA) program in 1998.

State open space funding has enabled the preservation of hundreds of acres of water quality protection to two key resources in Vernon, the Hockanum and Tankerhoosen rivers. The preserved lands have also provided popular recreational opportunities, including hiking, biking, fishing, and kayaking. The hiking and biking trails in Vernon are a regional attraction, and have been an economic benefit as well as a health benefit to the community.

Vernon is one of 9 towns in the Capitol Region classified by the Capitol Region Council of Governments as "Fully Suburban". We also have a high over-55 population, and need to attract young families to the community. Preservation of what little open space and farmland remains in Vernon is important to maintaining the visual attractiveness of the community and helps to offset the erosion of residential property values.

Farmland and open space projects need an IMMEDIATE and RELIABLE funding source. We are currently in that situation. The Vernon OSTF and a coalition of other volunteers are about to finalize a priority open space acquisition project that we've been working for several years. Our plans are dependent on full funding of the OSWA program. Without this funding base, the project will not be feasible, and we will have lost one of the most important resources in our town.

The 2005 Community Investment Act received remarkable grass-roots community support because the funding was earmarked for specific community needs (open space, historic preservation and affordable housing). Funds derived from town real estate transactions would be returned to communities through programs that met these needs.

To now "re-neg" on that promise of the CIA and sweep all of those funds into the State's General Fund transforms the Community Investment Act to just another real estate tax. It erodes confidence in government, and sets a dangerous precedent.

Please reinstate funding for the Community Investment Act.

Letter of Testimony from the Vernon Open Space Task Force

Ann Letendre  
Ginny Gingras  
Karl Hasel  
Brian Motola  
Tom Ouellette